

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

### **MONUMENT PEAK COMMUNICATION SITE**

**EA No. OR-030-99-011**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

##### **A. PURPOSE AND NEED**

The Vale District of the Bureau of Land Management proposes to implement the Monument Peak Communication Site Management Plan, which will permit maximum utilization of the site without degradation of the site or its potential. The purpose of the plan is to satisfy private and government right-of-way needs for communication sites, and to preserve and maintain site quality.

The communication site is located in T. 22 S., R. 39 E., section 12, SW1/4SW1/4 W.M., Malheur County, Oregon, about 55 miles west of Vale, Oregon, or approximately 9 miles southeast of Juntura, Oregon (refer to the site and location maps).

##### **B. HISTORY OF LAND USE**

Historically, Monument Peak has been used for livestock grazing and lies in North Star Mountain Allotment (Allotment No. 0310). There is no mineral activity at the present time.

Since the early 1960's the principal use of Monument Peak site on public land has been as a communication site and a fire lookout. The private land portion of Monument Peak was developed first in the late 1960's. BLM built a fire lookout on private land under an easement (ME-OR 3-2) and a two-way radio facility was installed in the fire lookout. Later a cement block building was constructed on private land (without an easement) for the BLM radio equipment. When BLM failed to acquire an easement, the BLM allowed the State of Oregon to acquire an easement under the building and the State of Oregon compensated the BLM with like type building materials which was used by BLM to construct the present BLM building located on public land. Although the number of users has been small, the site is well established, and the number of inquiries has increased. In order to satisfy future demands and provide for orderly development it is desirable and necessary to develop a plan for future site management.

In conjunction with the use of the site, BLM established an access road to the Monument Peak site. A portion of the road crosses private lands (2.75 miles) on which BLM has an easement (OR-14205) for it's own exclusive use. Presently any authorized BLM right-of-way holder on public land would have to acquire a road access easement across private land to ingress and egress the Monument Peak communication site.

Electronic transmission coverage from Monument Peak has a range of approximately 100

miles or less, and is limited primarily by the topography of the surrounding country side. Because of the elevation the site is an good site for long distance repeaters. The range of approximately 100 miles can be obtained from mountain top to mountain top. Other restrictions include the type and capability of electronic equipment and antenna. The Monument Peak site does have some limitations in coverage of the Malheur River canyon and US Highway 20.

On October 18, 1999 , the Monument Peak Communication Site Management Plan was approved after a period of review by site users and other interested parties. Refer to Table 1 for a description of the rights-of-way of record granted on the subject land.

## **MONUMENT PEAK COMMUNICATION SITE**

**Table 1 Current Rights-of-way Holders**

| Serial No.          | Holder                   | Date Granted<br>Approved<br>or Recorded | Type of Improvement  |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Public Land</b>  |                          |   |  |
| OR-14025            | Bureau of Land Mgt.      | 6-20-1960                               | BLM Access Road Easement (Pvt.)<br>Bk 116 P 195 (RE-OR 3-17) |
| OR-                 | Bureau of Land Mgt       |   | Communication Site<br>BLM Building                           |
| OR-                 | Bureau of Land Mgt       |   | BLM Access Road R/W  |
| <b>Private Land</b> |                          |   |  |
| N/A                 | Oregon Fish and Wildlife | 1970's                                  | Communication Site<br>State of Oregon Building               |

## **Current Ingress and Egress Access Routes to Monument Peak Communication Site**

### **Monument Peak Access Road**

Monument Peak access road is the primary access route to Monument Peak. The BLM has legal access to the site but any future BLM communication site right-of-way holders would have to acquire an access road easement from the private land owner to ingress and egress the Monument Peak communication site.

In order to gain legal access to Monument Peak for BLM right-of-way holders, BLM, at some future date, should acquire an easement from the private land owner or negotiate a reciprocal right-of-way agreement with the private land owner. The Current user on private land does not have a right-of-way across the public land portion of the road.

## **II. DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES**

### **A. PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE (PROPOSE ACTION) - SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Implementation of the Monument Peak Communication Site Management Plan would permit maximum utilization. The plan is designed to cover the next 10 years. The present BLM building has limited space for additional users because of the small building size. The antenna tower is short in height and would require another tower for any other users. The BLM building would be used to capacity before another structure is built. A subsequent building would be designed for multiple users, and the owner will have subleasing rights, if constructed by any party other than BLM. Single-use structures would be permitted. Right-of-way grants would include access to the site. BLM has surveyed the site (Cadastral Survey and prepared a topographic administrative site map) and established bench marks, which will be used to determine where any new facilities are to be constructed.

The objectives of the site management plan are as follow:

1. To provide a framework to guide BLM's future actions on Monument Peak.
2. To provide for the orderly, planned and compatible use of public lands comprising the Monument Peak Communication Site.
3. To protect the interests of right-of-way holders in preserving a compatible environment for all communication site users.
4. To provide for future expansion (compatible with existing authorized users) to meet anticipated public demand for communication site facilities.
5. To coordinate procedures with the various public agencies responsible for the management and regulation of communication sites.
6. To insure that the future development on Monument Peak shall be compatible, to the maximum feasible extent, with other resource programs (e. g., minerals management, visual resource management).

The entire plan can be found in the Monument Peak Communication Site Management Plan case file.

Implementation of the plan would provide maximum control over the site with a corresponding increase in efficiency in terms of the issuance of right-of-way grants with previously established stipulations and the use of the subject lands in an orderly manner. The plan conforms with the Management Framework Plan (MFP- Lands recommendation L-6.1 and L-6.2) for the Northern Malheur Resource Area. Also, the plan conforms with the draft Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan (RMP) as identified in the Lands Appendix L, Table L 2, which is presently under public review and comment.

**B. ALTERNATIVE 2 - CONTINUE PRESENT SITUATION (NO ACTION)**

Continue to process right-of-way applications as they are received, with each one considered on its own merit. Depending upon the demand, this alternative may not vary much from the preferred alternative. The largest difference will be the lack of an established set of standardized stipulations and guidelines for each grant and the lack of method to develop the site in a progressive and orderly manner.

This alternative is a "No Action" alternative because the operating plan will not be implemented. A "No Action" would mean that right-of-way applications would continue to be processed and issued on a case by case bases. A NEPA document would be prepared for each right-of-way application received.

Since the communication site already exists, moving the site to another location was not considered because it is the only peak in the area.

### **III. DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

The site is located on top of Monument Peak approximately 55 miles west of Vale, Oregon, or approximately 9 miles southeast of Juntura, Oregon, at an elevation of approximately 5699 feet. potential.

The subject lands are part of the semi-arid desert communities typical of eastern Oregon. The vegetation is dominated by blue bunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, Sandberg blue grass, phlox, buckwheat, rabbitbrush, and sagebrush. Wildlife consists mainly of small mammals, chukars and raptors, with occasional coyotes, mule deer and elk. Soils are of shallow and stoney-gravelly with a loamy texture. There are many surface stones and rock outcroppings. The terrain is steep and rough off the sides of the mountain. The top is relative flat where the buildings have been constructed. There are no mineral leases or mining claims of record. For more information on minerals, refer to the enclosed mineral report.

The land status of land is public land, administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Private land borders the site on the north side of site area.

Improvements on the site (public land portion) include one block building and steel tower for antennas, solar panel structures, and an access road. There is no electric power line to the site. The primary electric power source is solar power. Adjacent private land has been developed for communication site purposes.

A more comprehensive description of the general area is available in the Unit Resource Analysis (URA) of 1979 for the Northern Malheur Resource Area and the Ironside Environmental Impact Statement (1980). All these documents are available for public viewing at the Vale District Office.

#### **A. MANDATORY ITEMS**

1. **Threatened and Endangered Species**

There are no known threatened, endangered or special status species of plants or animals on the subject lands. Refer to the reports in the Monument Peak Communication Site case file.

2. **Floodplains and Wetlands**

Flood hazards are limited to seasonal run off, and largely confined to the drainages. There are no floodplains or wetlands on the subject lands.

3. **Wilderness Values**

There are no wilderness values associated with the subject lands.

4. **Areas of Critical Environmental Concern**

The subject lands are not within an Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

5. **Scenic (Visual) Values**

The subject lands have a VRM class IV rating with the following VRM objective definition: The objective of this class is to provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high. These management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention. However, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements.

6. **Water Resources**

Surface water is intermittent, with runoff resulting from precipitation and snow melt occurring mostly in the spring and fall seasons. Subsurface water has not been tapped, and there are no water storage facilities. Because of the elevation, the site is snow covered from November through April and sometimes into May and June.

7. **Air Quality**

Air quality on the subject lands is generally high. The principal sources of air pollution come from dust storms, range wildfires which are set by dry lightening storms or residue burning on agricultural lands in the Malheur River Valley Area.

8. **Cultural and Historical Resource Values**

A Class III examination for cultural resources was conducted on September 1, 1999. No archaeological or historical resources were found. For additional information, refer to the cultural resources report in the realty case file. The report is also on file in the resource area office.

9. **Paleontology Resources**

None are known to exist on the subject lands.

10. **Prime or Unique Farm Lands**

There is none on the subject land.

11. **Wild and Scenic Rivers**

There is none on the subject lands.

B. **CONSISTENCY WITH LAND USE PLANS**

1. **Northern Malheur MFP and Draft Southeast Oregon RMP**

Lands (L-6.1) Recommendation - Retain public lands which are presently being used for communication site purposes. Lands (L-6.2) Recommendation - Survey the exterior boundaries, establish bench marks, develop and implement an operating plan on all existing communication sites. The Draft Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan, as identified in the Lands Appendix L, Table L-2, lists the Monument Peak site as a site to complete a communication site plan.

2. **Malheur County land use plans**

The subject lands are classified as ERU (Exclusive Range Use) in the county zoning ordinance which permits the development of utility facilities.

3. **Statewide goals and objectives**

The proposal is consistent with applicable statewide goals and objectives.

#### IV. ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

##### A. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE ALTERNATIVES

###### 1. Preferred Alternative (Proposed Action) - Implementation of the Site Management Plan

Intensive use of the site for communication purposes would increase the probability of electronic interference as the amount of electronic equipment is close proximity increases. The degree of interference would therefore govern how close electronic equipment installations can be operated to one another.

The existing facilities are not visible from any major highway. The addition of new buildings and/or antennas will detract only slightly from the scenic quality of the area, since the site is already disturbed. It is likely that a new building(s) could be added to the site because of the limited space in the BLM building and based upon recent right-of-way inquiries of the past year. The addition of any new building(s) and antennas would have a cumulative impact on the site. If any new building(s) and/or antennas are constructed in the future, the building size should be large enough to accommodate multi users which should satisfy the demand for the foreseeable future.

Livestock use could cause erosion around the base of the building foundations and rubbing on tower structures. Fencing critical improvements would eliminate these problems whenever and if they occur. Fencing may be required by the right-of-way applicants to reduce vandalism and provide protection to their facilities at the site. There would be some soil disturbance and removal of vegetation around each post hole. Generally, galvanized steel chain link fences are used around communication site facilities.

In the event of new construction, impacts on soil and vegetation would be localized and minimal because of the shallow soil and sparse vegetation. Impacts on wildlife would be negligible. Traffic and visitor disturbance to the site is negligible because access is limited by steep terrain and remoteness ; the access road is a truck or four wheel drive vehicle road and not a passenger car road. Because of the limited access, maintenance has been minimal on the road.

The preferred alternative provides a means for orderly development, more efficient management, and perhaps a greater return in rental receipts because an operating plan would provide more intensive use with proportionately fewer impacts.

###### 2. Alternative 2 (No Action) - Continue Present Situation

The impacts from this Alternative are essentially the same as those above, except there would be less control over development and less consistency in the terms and conditions brought forward in right-of-way grants. Each right-of-way application would require a separate NEPA documentation and the necessary site clearances.

## **B. PROPOSED MITIGATING MEASURES FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

In order to control interference, only low power, i.e., 250 watts or less of transmitter power, facilities will be allowed, with antenna tower height limited to 50 feet above the ground level. Antennas may extend beyond tower height. These limits are consistent with existing facilities at the site. Right-of-way grants will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis and subject to prior existing rights. It will be the responsibility of each grant holder to mitigate the interference generated by his equipment. The holder will be required to conform with FCC requirements, or the Interdepartmental Radio Advisory Committee (IRAC) requirements, if use is by the Federal government. BLM will maintain a prior established right for its facilities, and in the event of future need for the site, holder(s) will vacate the premises upon written request.

Once the existing BLM facilities are used to capacity, a new building may be constructed. If a right-of-way holder chooses to construct a building, BLM may require the holder to accommodate the present users of the BLM facilities or if the BLM constructs a new building, it will be of suitable size to accommodate other potential users. Requests for single users facilities will be permitted and considered on a case by case basis. Before approval, the applicants must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Authorized Officer why it is not feasible to locate in an existing multiple-user building or to construct a new facility capable of housing multiple users.

When multiple use facilities are constructed by a **non-profit and/or governmental entity**, the multiple user right-of-way holder will be required to pay BLM a percentage of the gross rental derived from sub-leasing rights or in accordance to BLM fee schedule. The percentage will be determined by the Authorized Officer prior to issuance of the grant. Any non-profit and/or governmental entity located in a multiple or single user facility will be required to file for a right-of-way with the BLM.

The design will be compatible with the present design, preferably concrete block, brick or similar materials on a concrete foundation or commercial prefabricated rock aggregate buildings or prefabricated fiberglass buildings anchored to concrete piers will be permitted. Prefabricated or stick built metal and frame buildings will not be allowed. Exterior surfaces will be colored to blend with surrounding vegetation, rock color, and soil color. Color determination will be made by the Authorized Officer. The structure will meet local building codes. The free standing antenna towers will be the preferred tower type, unless guy wires can be added in a manner that not present safety or electrical hazards and can stand severe wind and ice load conditions.



Antennas and supports will be constructed of non-reflecting material. All equipment will be properly grounded, and all wiring, switching, grounding, and other materials and electronic equipment will meet the National Electrical Safety Code and other industry standards.

Radio Frequency Energy Exposure will comply with American National Standard Institute (ANSI) C 95 1-1992 and National Council for Radiation Protection (NCRP) Report 86.

Electrical power line cables should be buried from the meter base to communication site structure or placed in a plastic conduit and covered with soil and/or rocks and marked with signs.

A multiple use facility constructed by anyone other than BLM generates the risk of unauthorized occupancy and use. Therefore, a right-of-way holder may not enter into a third party agreement without the written consent of BLM. In addition, the owner of such a facility will provide the Bureau with a schedule of charges for use of the facility to prevent unfair competition and restraint of trade.

All holders will be required to maintain their sites and keep them clean. Soils disturbed during construction will be reseeded with noxious weed seed-free seed.

BLM will assume responsibility for maintaining the access road to the site, except for plowing snow. Winter access to the site is not guaranteed.

In order to reduce erosion damage as well as any physical damage around communication site structures by livestock, the communication site complex should be fenced. There will be some soil disturbance and vegetation removal during fence construction activity. If a fence is determined to be necessary, it would be a galvanized chain link type fence. The impacts would be minimal with as little soil disturbance as possible around each post hole area and any disturbed areas would be seeded.

The use of gasoline and diesel generating equipment or similar types of fuel will not be allowed. The use of propane fuel would be allowed. If electric power is brought to the site there would be some soil disturbance from trenching the buried power cables on the communication site plan area. Any power line running to the communication site plan area from the outside the site area would be handled as a separate right-of-way application and have its own NEPA documentation.

#### **C. RESIDUAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The visual impacts that are now on the site would increase as more facilities are added. This increase is permissible within the visual Class IV area. Use of the access road and the number of visits to the sites would increase as the number of users increase. More activity at the site would disturb grazing livestock, but this disturbance would probably be confined to the area near the improvements. Loss of AUMs by the addition of new

facilities would be insignificant, with less than 400 sq. ft. of range expected to be lost if a new building is constructed. However, when the site is fenced there will be a loss of AUMs on approximately two to five surface acres which would be less than one AUM.. The addition of any new building(s) and/or antennas would have a cumulative impact on the site.

**D. IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES**

Native vegetation would be destroyed and there is some potential for permanent soil loss from construction and increased use of the site. Rights-of-way are not irreversible; the site can be restored to a natural state.

**V. PERSONS, GROUPS AND AGENCIES CONSULTED**

- A. Right-of-way holders and users (See Table 1)
- B. Malheur County Court, Vale, Oregon
- C. Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer, Salem, Oregon
- D. Adjacent Monument Peak communication site user on private land

**VI. INTENSITY OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

No objections have been offered to the implementation of the management plan.

**VII. PARTICIPATING STAFF**

Roy Masinton, Malheur Field Office Manager  
Sheldon Saxton, Realty Specialist and District Communication Site Manager  
Dick Thompson, Communication Specialist/Technician  
Bob Alward, Outdoor Recreation Planner  
Vern Pritchard, Supervisory Civil Engineer  
Diane Pritchard, Archaeologist  
Bill Holsheimer, Geologist  
Jean Findley, Botanist  
Randy Eyre, Planning and Environmental Coordinator  
Ron Rembowski, Range Conservationist  
Jon Freeman, Realty Specialist  
Richard, Martinez, Engineer Technician  
Albert Bammann, Wildlife Biologist

## VIII FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

On the basis of the information contained in this EA and all other information available, it is my determination that the proposed action is in conformance with the land use plan for the area and does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment and that as EIS is not required.

S/Roy L. Masinton  
Malheur Field Office Manager

09/23/99  
Date

**IX      DECISION RECORD**

On the basis of the information in this EA (OR-030-99-011) and all other information available, it is my decision to implement the proposed action as described.

S/Roy L. Masinton  
Malheur Field Office Manager

10/12/99  
Date